The Message of the Modern Minister

Rev. Henry E. Jackson

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By

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Introduction by

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"A man's religion is the chief fact with regard to him. By religion I mean the thing a man does practically believe; the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny therein, that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest."

THOMAS CARLYLE

INTRODUCTION

It has been the custom in Congregational churches for many years for candidates about to be ordained, or installed, to present to an Ecclesiastical Council statements of their religious experience and doctrinal beliefs. The following paper was presented by its author to the Council convened to consider the question of his installation as pastor of the Christian Union Congregational Church at Upper Montclair, New Jersey. It is more personal and less formal than such papers usually are. In its delivery it almost took the form of a sermon *ad clerum*. The impression which it made was profound, and the wish was unanimous that it might be preserved in print and thus given to a larger public. Its chief characteristic may be termed its "modernism." It deals with living questions, and approaches them in unconventional ways. The writer comes to his

subject by the path of experience. He has written profoundly because he has first lived profoundly. He believes that every truth which is really helpful may be preached, and that no doctrine which cannot be preached has any claim upon the Christian minister or the Christian public. While this paper is modern it is also thoroughly constructive. There is not a destructive note in all these pages. Without claiming that the message of the preacher for to-day will be the message for all time, its author has sought to bring into clear relief some of the truths which have most vital relation to the present time. That the pulpit has a message for to-day very different from what it had even half a century ago does not admit of doubt. Whether we are willing to admit it or not, we study almost every subject from the evolutionary standpoint. In the old days the Bible was regarded as a book written by the hand of God; now it is known to be the literature of a people which contains the record of the process by which one nation was taught the true religion in order that it might become the teacher of that

religion to the world. Formerly this earth was regarded as the centre of a limited creation; now we have to adjust our thinking to the conception of the universe, which is comparatively a modern conception. These changes do not affect the substance of doctrine but they have changed the way in which it has to be presented. The modern man thinks in new terms, and he who would effectively preach to him must use the language with which his hearer is most familiar.

I commend the address which is contained in the following pages as able, timely, and thoroughly abreast of current thought. It contains no novel teaching, but it is a wise and balanced presentation of the everlasting realities of religion as they are related to life and thought in the days in which we are living.

AMORY H. BRADFORD.

First Congregational Church,
Montclair, New Jersey,

The Message of the Modern Minister

"By religion I mean the power, whatever it be, which makes a man choose what is hard rather than what is easy, what is lofty and noble rather than what is mean and selfish; that puts courage into timorous hearts, and gladness into clouded spirits; that consoles men in grief, misfortune and disappointment; that makes men joyfully accept a heavy burden; that, in a word, uplifts men out of the dominion of material things, and sets their feet in a purer and simpler region."

ARTHUR C. BENSON

"An essentially religious attitude is necessary to the noblest living. Life needs to be touched with the glamour of wonder and deepened with the atmosphere of reverence. Men live less by knowledge than by an appreciation of what has not yet been gathered up in the categories of science. The great experiences of human life break in through the closed circle of our knowledge; we can never anticipate them in theory. Life precedes philosophy: in a very true sense men are better than they know, living in experience much that they have not yet formulated in terms of the understanding."

EDWARD HOWARD GRIGGS

The Message of the Modern Minister

OBVIOUSLY the thing suggested first by an exercise like this is the importance of knowing how and what a man thinks. The custom of the Congregational Church in asking an incoming minister to make a formal statement of his views, is itself a rebuke to the superficial, but frequently expressed opinion, that it does not matter what a man thinks, but matters only what he does. Chesterton did not over-state the truth when he said that "there are some people, and I am one of them, who think that the most practical and important thing about a man is his view of the universe. We think that for a landlady considering a lodger, it is important to know his income, but still more important to know his philosophy." This

statement is true of any man, but specially true of the man who attempts to form the opinions of others. When the Master of Balliol, Dr. Jowett, was asked by a woman who thought him to be liberal in his views of religion: "Sir, can you tell us what you really think about God?" he answered: "Madam, it matters very little what I think about God; but it matters a great deal what God thinks about me." Underneath Dr. Jowett's answer is another obvious answer which some one else has added: "It matters very much what I think God thinks about me." Since God is the one unescapable reality of a man's life, without which one can neither think, nor speak, nor act, it is of the first importance to have true views of Him. Few things matter quite so much. A man's very refusal to define his attitude to God, itself defines it. Your request, therefore, that I present to you an outline of my outlook on religious questions, is most appropriate and one which I most cheerfully grant.

In order to save myself the embarrassment of feeling that I am stating

views, just for the purpose of having them dissected, and save you from the sense of the unreality of performing a merely negative task, I take the liberty of letting you see incidentally my point of view, by stating some things which have more or less recently impressed themselves on me, in my own experience as a Christian and as a preacher,—some things which I think ought to be emphasized to-day by the man who attempts to be a spiritual leader. If I can feel that I am preaching to you, I shall immediately feel at ease, and if I tell you what things I think you ought to emphasize in your preaching, you can at once see what things I deem important.

I suggest that after my statement, it would be most helpful if we should have a mutual conference about those elements of the Christian religion which its teachers ought to make clear and prominent, if the church is to be a real power and service to the men of to-day. I shall never forget an all-night meeting held last year in Princeton by twenty-four members of our class, at the tenth anniversary of its graduation from the Theo-

logical Seminary. The subject of the conference was this very question. There were two facts upon which all the men agreed and which impressed me most deeply. One was this: Every man present felt a sense of confusion and bewilderment about his theological outlook. Every man testified that the point of view given to him ten years before, and which many of them held at that time, had become unreal to him personally, and had ceased to be of value to him in his work. The other was this: Every man present had an honest desire to find out what were the essential and fundamental truths of the Gospel of Christ and how they ought to be presented. The testimony of these twenty-four ministers is most significant, for the problem they faced is one that must be continually faced by every earnest Christian teacher who is awake to his responsibility. Therefore a conference upon it on an occasion like this is an opportunity to do a real service for any men who may be in a similar situation.

I propose, therefore, to state five practical and fundamental truths, made real

in my experience, which I think ought to be controlling and guiding principles in any minister's public teaching.

I

Sin is a Reality and Salvation is a Present Process

The first fact which my experience leads me to suggest, and which my position to-day reminds me of anew, is this. I do not find that the work of the Christian minister becomes increasingly easy, but rather increasingly difficult. Not that the preparation and preaching of sermons is a burden. I love that work, although it is an enormous task for any man to undertake. Not that the calling and pastoral work are so hard. I love that too. What makes the minister's work ever more difficult, is the failure to embody in one's own life the ideals which he preaches. As I come to know more and more of the needs and sorrows and loneliness of men, and as I come to know more and more the charm and wonder and greatness of the message of Jesus, I

find it increasingly hard to apply that message to that need effectively by embodying it in my own life. It was not hard to be a minister of religion at a time when religion did not concern itself with character and when the priests of Greece and Rome never for a moment regarded it as part of their duty to help men to a purer life. But to be a Christian minister to-day is a different matter and is difficult chiefly for the very reason that once made it easy. "Clever men," said Huxley, "are as common as blackberries. The rare thing is to find a good one." The rare and difficult thing for the minister is to be a good man, and a good man on the minister's lips means to be the kind of man he urges others to be. The subtle danger of professionalism, a relying on the conventional forms instead of seeking for the substance beneath, uttering the letter of the law only from the teeth out, instead of incarnating its spirit, is a danger which I find ever ready to spoil the minister's own life and make ineffective his message to men. I believe no man so well as the minister knows what Gladstone meant

when he said: "There is one proposition which the experience of life has burned into my soul. It is the fear that my religion shall kill my morality. Every day of my life in thousands of different ways, some great, some small, all of them subtle, I am tempted to that great sin."

My own experience thus has helped to give to me my doctrine of sin. For the study of sin, as Simpson says, if it is to be really serious and effective, is a study of one's self. Because I myself know what the seventh chapter of Romans is, I believe sin is a reality. It is not merely involuntary error, or mere unripeness, as in an apple. It is that; but it is also an act of the will, a violation of the laws of life, and every specific sin is a form and manifestation of its root principle, which is selfishness. I do not think that any elemental passion in a man's life is wrong in itself. Sin is just the wrong use of the right thing. That such a wrong use has been universally made, there can be no doubt in the mind of any man who knows himself and knows life as it is. I believe, then, that sin as a reality is a cardinal question for

religion and philosophy and for practical life, and is, therefore, to be emphasized by the minister.

Growing out of this fact and cognate to it, is, of course, the doctrine of forgiveness, or salvation, or atonement. When all other religious questions cease to interest men, they will still ask: What is it which saves? How can men be helped to be what they want to be? "There are no men who are not interested to know whether there is any power in the world which will help to overcome evil, to cure ignorance, to comfort in sorrow, to take out the sting of remorse for the past, to inspire with aspirations of hope for the future."

Christianity's method is distinct from every other which seeks to help man reach his ideal. Humanism seeks to do it by emancipation of the mind, Christianity by changing the heart and the will. "The one wishes to make better by enlightening, the other to enlighten by making better. This is the difference between Socrates and Jesus," a difference which the Christian minister must never lose sight of.

But just what the Christian conception of salvation is—that is where the minister's task and difficulty begin; that is where his opportunity begins too. No word is more commonly on the lips of Christian men than the word "salvation," and yet no word is more commonly misunderstood. If any man wishes to find out whether that is so or not, all he has to do is to ask a dozen average Christians to meet him and state what they think salvation is, just what does Christ do for a man when He saves him, just what takes place in the heart of the man who receives salvation. The answers he will get will not only astonish him, but also discourage him. One great duty of a minister to-day becomes perfectly apparent when he discovers how many Christians there are who think that salvation is a kind of reserved-seat ticket which they secure to be used sometime in the future. I do not like to use a phrase which seems irreverent, but no simile more dignified will describe the idea, the idea that salvation is a kind of plan by which they hope to escape from the post-mortem consequences of misdoing. Such

a conception of salvation accounts largely for the existence in the churches of an unlovely and defective type of Christian character. Such a conception is to-day one of the great barriers between the church and the thinking men outside of it. It is needless to say that I think such a conception has no justification whatsoever in the teaching of Jesus.

In view of this common misconception, which is admirably stated in the little book by Patterson DuBois, called "The Culture of Justice," a need which I regard as one of the greatest in the church of to-day, I propose immediately to begin a series of as many sermons as may be necessary, on what I shall call "The Practice of Salvation," in the hope of making clear what I think is the Christian conception of salvation, not as a method by which a man is released from punishment, because he thinks some one else has been punished for him, which is both impossible and immoral, because punishment can be experienced only where there is guilt; therefore, punishment is not transferable; sin and its punishment are riveted together; but

salvation as an actual atonement, through the vicarious suffering of the Son of God, a process by which he is being saved, not from punishment, escape from which is nowhere promised to him, but saved from sin; a method by which men are saved not by the physical death of Jesus, but by His love, as He Himself said, that the Father gave His Son because He so loved the world; a method by which the sense of guilt, the worst of all blights that fall upon the soul, is removed; a method by which to acquire the power of moral recovery; a method by which the good in man is reinforced and helped to conquer; a process by which a man here and now is made at one, and brought into harmony with, the law of life, which is the Will of God.

II

The Intellect is Limited and Faith is Therefore a Necessity

The second fact which my experience has deeply impressed upon me, and which has a vast effect on my work as a

minister, is the need of more Christian agnosticism, such as Paul had, when he said: "I know in fragments." What I mean is this. Every normal minister feels that there ought to be the accent of certainty in his public teaching. He knows that it is this note that men hope to find when they come to him. He knows that men are indifferent to him when they have any misgiving that the preacher knows no more than they do about spiritual things. He knows that a doubtful gospel is a weakened and divided message, as the word doubt literally means. It is debilitating to rule life by negatives. He cannot express himself in negatives and remain a Christian minister.

The people, also, eagerly desire more definite knowledge on matters of the first importance. They feel with Harriet Martineau, that "we have a right to know." If they feel the pressure of the problem of life, they feel that they are entitled to more light upon the mystery. "If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly," is the demand still in the hearts of great numbers of men. Who has not, at times,

uttered Carlyle's cry that God might break through the silence and speak? Without some word from Him, even the stars were a "sad sight" to Carlyle. Who has not at times uttered Browning's prayer?

"Come then, complete incompletion, O Comer,
Pant through the blueness, perfect the Summer!"

Without some message from Him, even Summer's beauty is found wanting.

In view of this eager desire, which men have, for definite information about their life and destiny, and in view of the minister's honest wish to satisfy this need, it is impossible not to chafe under the little that we know. This constitutes a chief difficulty in the minister's work as a teacher. How little we know of God and duty and immortality. "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid?" Why should the very being of God be a question open to discussion? Why should the grave be an effectual barrier between the living and the dead?

"Strange, is it not? that of the myriads, who
Before us passed the Door of Darkness
through,
Not one returned to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too."

I think that our ignorance on these questions and the confident pulpit tone which ignores the fact that there is any mystery in God's dealings with men, are responsible, not only for the apparent religious indifference so common to-day, but also constitute a serious difficulty for the minister himself. It has weighed heavily upon my own heart.

When, therefore, I made two discoveries about this fact, I felt that the sun had broken through the clouds for me as a minister. The two discoveries were these: "We know enough for true living, and not too much for noble living; that the things essential for true living are surely known; that the things only known in fragments contain great moral value by their very mystery.

About some things God has left us in no doubt. Speaking of these venerable landmarks, to which a man ought per-

sistently to cling, Robertson of Brighton said: "In the darkest hour through which a human soul can pass, whatever else is doubtful, this at least is certain. If there be no God and no future state, even then it is better to be generous than selfish, better to be chaste than licentious, better to be brave than be a coward." Of these moral certainties at least we know the worth. I began to see also that these moral certainties come first in God's order. If a man would get light on life's mystery, he must first obey in the things about which there is no doubt. If a man has no faith in the worth of duty, he can have no faith in God.

As to the things which are not so surely known, when I consciously took the agnostic attitude of Paul and said, "I know only in fragments," I began to see that there was a great moral value in mystery. If a man knew for certain the result and reward of a virtuous action, his act would cease to have moral worth and become enlightened selfishness. All heroism would be at once eliminated. If a man could know the future his knowledge would convert his future into a past

and as his body walked forward, his face would be where the back of his head is, looking over the path already trod; this would paralyze his will for present action. Ignorance of the future is one of man's chiefest boons. It prevents trouble from crushing him twice. Mystery has a distinct positive moral value. It is what the old philosophers called an "advantageous deficiency."

From the time that Professor Huxley invented the word "agnostic," it has been made to stand for two very opposite ideas. The agnosticism of the positivist regards the unknowable as a stone wall too hard to pierce, too high to see over, and an insult to his intelligence. The Christian agnosticism is a sane, humble confession of the limits of the human intellect, a limitation with a distinct moral value. The abuse of the idea has caused Christian men to be afraid of the word and suffer in consequence a serious loss. The true Christian agnosticism was one of the most illuminating discoveries in my life, very far-reaching in its application. Its vast importance becomes apparent when we notice

how many practical questions it illuminates.

The discovery helped me to see that all great truths are dual. They have two sides which are opposite, but not contradictory. Christian agnosticism prevents a man from accepting one side alone and emphasizing it by denying its opposite, one of the commonest of mistakes, but rather teaches him to see the truth of both, up to the limits of his knowledge and to postpone any attempt at a final reconciliation until some future day, when more light shall break upon them. This single fact gives a working reconciliation between God's sovereignty and man's free will, between love and duty, as principles of action, between truth and beauty as elements of God's world.

The discovery helped me to avoid the mistake of dividing a man into departments and thinking that any one alone was a sufficient guide for life, helped me to see that the division of mental powers into feeling and knowing and willing, is a theoretic distinction in function alone, and that in every act of a man's life,

these powers must interact, that for sane living the whole man must act, heart and head are both needed.

The discovery did me a service of untold value, when it showed me that there were some truths which are too important to rest on proof, a fact strongly stated in Tennyson's "Ancient Sage":

"Thou canst not prove the Nameless, O, my son,
Nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in;
Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,
Nor canst thou prove that thou art spirit alone;
Nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one;
Thou canst not prove that thou art immortal, no,
Nor yet, that thou art mortal, nay, my son,
Thou canst not prove that I who speak with thee
Art not thyself in converse with thyself;
For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproved, wherefore, thou be wise
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt
And cling to faith beyond the forms of Faith."

The discovery saves the Christian man from the shallow conceit, revealed in so many creeds of the past, that assumes to analyze and classify and formulate a complete plan of the Universe, the conceit against which Carlyle protested when he said that some Christians talk as if God were their next-door neighbor and they were intimately acquainted with all His affairs. After stating the fundamentals in our creeds, a large margin or unexplored remainder ought to be left for faith, in regard to which a man ought to say with Paul, "I know only in fragments." It is for this reason that the Christian poets are the wisest of theologians, dealing with concrete facts and leaving a margin for the imagination, which is faith. The poet is not like the philosopher in Emerson's poem, who is lined with eyes inside, and who tries to catch the unconscious heart in the very act. In such an analytical process, the sage unmakes the man. The work and methods of the minister and the minstrel, as their names indicate, lie close together and in many respects are identical.

The discovery made the Holy Spirit real to me. I got no help from the theological formulas as to the third person of the Trinity. I got no help from the loose mechanical descriptions of what is called the baptism of the Holy Ghost. But it was a real help when I saw that the Holy Spirit was just the life of God in the soul. When the intellect could not, by searching, find out God, the Holy Spirit did just what the intellect could not do, revealed God through the fundamental instincts of the soul, creating and developing what might be called a sixth sense.

The discovery helps a man to see that just because mystery out-tops knowledge, therefore the appropriate attitude is one of trust. The world being what it is, and man being limited as he is, the trustful life is the only rational life. It alone brings into the human heart the tranquillity of God.

"I have always had one lode-star; now,
As I look back, I see that I have halted
Or hastened, as I looked towards that star—
A need, a trust, a yearning after God."

I think the great contribution which the noble poem of Job has made to man is the sanity of living a life of trust in a world which we do not understand. After he and his friends had made their answer to his problem, it still remained an open wound. Then God presents to Job indecipherable mystery and for the first time Job is comforted. Job flings at God a dozen riddles, God flings back at Job a hundred riddles and Job is at peace. He has discovered that the trustful life is the only sane life for man whose keenest knowledge cannot compass a tithe of the wonders that lie at his feet.

The discovery saves the Christian from intellectual pride and helps him combine a positive faith with humility, such as is combined in Tennyson's statement, "I hardly dare name His Name, but take away belief in the self-conscious personality of God, and you take away the backbone of the world."

The discovery saves the man of the world from the mistakes he so often makes in times of grief and perplexity, saves him from dashing himself in

rage against a wall which is too hard to pierce and falling back bruised and weary. It would keep him from stumbling over his own head. It would help him to see that the Bible does not cease to be a lamp to his feet because it does not reveal all he eagerly desires to know. "It is like a lantern he carries in his hand on a dark night. It does not illumine the whole forest through which he picks his way. It sheds a ray of light on the path on which he walks and shows him where to put his foot in his next step. To reveal light for each day's duty, is all the knowledge that God meant revelation to give. The thing which such a man most needs is the attitude of Christian agnosticism, which leads him to say with Paul, "Even as things are, there abide faith, hope, and love."

It seems clear to me, therefore, that the attitude of Christian agnosticism is the very opposite of a denial of religion. It is one of the most needed, positive, and indispensable elements *in* any religion that can be called true. My contention is that one of the most needed and positive messages of the minister to-day to

men, both inside and outside the church, is the necessity of living the trustful life; and I use the word "agnosticism" just for the purpose of emphasizing that fact. The word "agnosticism" is misunderstood because it has been misapplied; but the word "faith" is no less misunderstood. When the word "faith" is used, men generally think of intellectual dogmas. It never meant that to Jesus. To Him it meant a reliance upon the intuitions and not upon the reason. To rescue faith from philosophy and make it mean what it means in the New Testament, is one of the great tasks for the minister. Until men are led to take Paul's attitude of agnosticism, there can be no place in their lives for faith, in the New Testament sense, not an intellectual creed, but a living trust. The first thing to be said about the three mystic virtues, faith, hope and love, which Christianity invented, is that they are unreasonable, a fact which Chesterton has well pointed out. Indeed, this is their chief merit. They are not the product of reasoning. They are designed to do what the reason is unable to do; to teach all men how to

be guided by faith, hope and love, rather than depend on the lame and limited power of reason, I regard as among the minister's first and chiefest functions.

III

Life Must be Construed in Terms, not of Matter, but of Spirit

The third fact which my experience has shown to me to be of primal importance to the minister is this. He must look at life in terms of spirit, not in terms of matter. Whether the mind is a function of the brain, or whether man is essentially a spirit who uses a body as an instrument for temporary purposes, is a crucial question that divides Christian from unchristian thought. On this question the minister must get the certainty that is born of pure and spiritual vision and on it he must dogmatize, for unless he can believe that man was not born to die, he could be a teacher of ethics, but not a teacher of Christianity. This is the citadel for Christian faith, and it will be of little use for her ministers to guard

the outposts while the citadel itself is in danger.

I well remember the challenge made to me by a physician at an operation performed on Dr. Day, a brilliant professor in Swarthmore College. Years previously he had received a blow on the head. After some years it so affected the brain that the man's faculties, one by one, were lost. I was present at the operation at the family's request. With consummate skill, the surgeons opened the head and located the trouble. During the process, I asked Dr. Mitchell, a consulting surgeon, this question: If a slight injury to the brain could rob Dr. Day of his faculties, thought, memory and speech, where is the man now, the spirit that made him what he was, the man we knew and loved? Dr. Mitchell answered the question by asking another. You are a Christian minister, are you not? When I answered yes, "Then," said he, "that question is one for you to answer." During the entire night after the operation I sat in meditation upon Dr. Mitchell's answer. I accepted the challenge. Unless I could accept it with confidence, I

could not be a minister. Since then I have had a near view of death, and what I saw then makes it unnecessary for me longer to argue the question with myself. I know with the certainty born of direct vision.

"We may question with wand of science,
Explain, deride and discuss;
But only in meditation
The mystery speaks to us."

This is the one article of faith which Jesus submitted to Martha. Jesus made it a cardinal question of belief. When Martha came to Him on the death of her brother and was not satisfied with a far-off resurrection, but asked for some present comfort, He said: "I am [now] the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on Me shall never die. Believeth thou this?" What was it that Jesus asked her to believe? It was this, that Lazarus was not mere matter, subject to decay, but was spirit and that he was alive. He asked her to believe in the spiritual nature of man, to trust the logic of the heart not of the head, to

believe in the absolute continuity of life, a belief not found in Jewish or pagan literature before the time of Christ. If I were asked to state in one word the real function of the Christian minister, I would say that it is to teach men how to live under the aspect of eternity. It is of the first importance for men to know that they are now in eternity. The distinction between time and eternity is both false and harmful. What we call time has in fact no existence at all. It is merely a conventional idea invented for practical convenience. It is just that section of eternity of which we are conscious. In speaking of the Puritan and Huguenot, Carlyle said:

"It is a fruitful kind of study, that of men who do in every deed understand and feel at all moments that they are in contact with God, that the right and wrong of this little life has extended itself into eternity and infinitude; it is at bottom my religion too."

This fact which Jesus regarded as fundamental has a vast practical significance, a significance strangely overlooked in the Middle Ages, strangely

overlooked also in our day, though for a very different reason. Very subtle is the danger that it will be obscured to-day by the demands of humanitarian movements. The poor of course must be cared for and protected. Jesus made such effort the real test of the sincerity of religion. For it is an unescapable law that a man's religious life goes up no higher on the perpendicular, that is towards God, than it goes out on the horizontal, that is towards men. Certainly no man ever more sympathetically responded to the needs of the poor than did Jesus, and yet He always gave a perpetual primacy to the spiritual in man. The Christian Church must never do otherwise. It is most illuminating to discover that such primacy as Jesus' sanity gave to the spiritual, instead of neglecting material demands, is in fact the best inspiration for securing them and the best guardian of them when they are secured. In proportion as souls are valued, bodies will be properly treated. No statement needs more emphatic reiteration to-day, for the sake of rich and poor alike, than this, that man himself is of more value

than property. The condition that makes money dear and men cheap has no more uncompromising enemy than the idea which is an axiom in Christian thought that the meanest unit of society has value because it has a soul.

I regard this, then, as one of the chief truths which the minister ought to teach to the men of to-day, or any day, to teach them what Dante said Virgil taught him: "You taught me how to be eternal."

IV

The Cross in Our Experience is a Means to a Good End

The fourth fact to which my experience as a man and a minister has given outstanding importance, is the fact that the need of some workable attitude to suffering is among the deepest of all human needs. Few subjects have haunted me more than this; on few subjects have I preached more frequently. Joseph Parker advised ministers that they ought always to preach to the men in the pews who are in sorrow: that

means all of them. Dr. Watson said when he closed his ministry in Liverpool, that if he had his life to live over again, he would be careful to do three things in particular. He would preach shorter sermons; he would be more attentive to his English; and he would preach more comfortingly. I cannot yet appreciate why he should give so much importance to the first two suggestions, but I am quite sure that the last one needs all the emphasis which he gives it and more. From my own experience, I can appreciate the feeling of that sensitive and brilliant young student whose experience Dr. Fairbairn relates. When he entered the pulpit for the first time and faced the upturned eyes of men, there came such a vision of the evils that filled life and the impotence of the preacher and the word he preached, either to mend or to end them, that he vowed to God in whose goodness he still believed, that if he were allowed to escape with his reason from that appalling place, he would not again lift up his voice in a pulpit until he had a message better fitted for the supreme crisis of the soul so-

journing amidst scenes so confused and perplexing. The message never came and he never returned to the pulpit. I believe he was right so far as this, that if the minister has no gospel for the sorrows of life, his place is not in the pulpit. I understand that no difficulty is so often presented in literature as this. I understand that it remains an unsolved problem in philosophy. I also know that every man is forced to find for himself a moral reason for suffering. I also know that just as "nothing so marks man's progress as the successive solutions he has attempted to this problem," so there is no finer or surer test of each man's success in life than the personal attitude he takes to it. There is, for example, no surer indication of the temper and outlook of Tennyson, Longfellow and Browning, than the solution which each one offers to this question. The same is true of every other Christian man.

I believe that Christianity does not offer a final solution for the existence of pain, but I believe that Christianity offers a final, workable attitude to it. Jesus never explained the problem of suffering,

He just brought God into it. Burne-Jones, when he prepared his mosaic of "Christ on the Tree of Life," wrote at the foot his favorite text, in the words of Vulgate, "In mundo pressuram habebitis" (In the world ye shall have pressure) —words that seemed to him in a peculiar manner to express the burden and pressure of life. "But I have overcome the world." All that he knew of religion, he said, all that he believed of Christian faith, was summed up in these words. If Christ made that word good, then He is really our God. That is the minister's message. Jesus met suffering and worsted it on its own ground. The same victory is possible for His followers.

The word "cross" has had in the past two distinct meanings. It is the symbol of all that is most precious in the Christian life; it represents what Christ has done for us, and as such, it is a strength and comfort. It also stands for what we are called upon to endure for Him, and as such it is a test and burden and conflict. Both ideas are reflected frequently in Christian song and experience. I believe the time will come when the

word "cross" will acquire in men's thought a third and new meaning. It will stand for suffering as a means of joy. There is no conviction which I more tenaciously hold than this, that on the other side of every cross-bearing, there is a joy and an experience, for the sake of which the cross is given; that all pain willingly borne brings immediate blessing; that the gladdest people in the world are not those who have no crosses, but those who have. This statement is verified in the lives of men irrespective of their attitude to the Christian faith. The insight into spiritual realities which an experience of pain gave to the scientist, John George Romanes, who abandoned the Christian faith of his childhood and then returned to it, is a sufficient and beautiful demonstration that it is a universal truth.

There are few messages from the Christian minister more needed than this —needed by the minister himself; for if the minister has begun his work, harassed by doubts, created for him by his university or theological studies, and distressed because he lacks the accent of cer-

tainty in his message, there is no surer cure for his difficulties than an honest effort to minister to the needs and sorrows of men and women;—needed also for the men of to-day, for, if men could once see that suffering is God's minister to manhood, and that "when pain ends gain ends too," then the bitterness and weariness of spirit, so characteristic of our day and which is far worse than any philosophical pessimism, would cease to exist. To meet this settled weariness of spirit the Christian minister of to-day must stand as a robust optimist, such as Browning described himself to be,

"One who never turned his back
But marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted,
Wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise,
Are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

V

The Christ of the Gospels is the Sole and Sufficient Guide for Life

The fifth fact born out of my experience which I mention last, because I think it is the chief fact to be emphasized today by the Christian minister, is the sole sovereignty of Jesus, as a guide for life. No other single fact in my Christian experience has more deeply impressed me than the absolute uniqueness and dependableness of Jesus as He is presented in the four gospels. After a man has preached for ten years and tried many diverse methods and lines of thought and become more or less acquainted with books and poets and philosophers, he comes to feel that nothing is worth preaching about, except the life and teaching of Jesus. Certainly all else assumes a vastly smaller importance in comparison. That statement of Browning, which I used to think was the exaggeration of a devotee, I now see and believe to be literally true.

"I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in this earth and out of it."

I believe that one of the greatest needs of the Christian church to-day is a larger acquaintance with the four gospels. The four gospels are as little generally known as any books on the market to-day: They are not either seriously or honestly studied by any very large number of men inside the church, or out of it. Few things are less known than the position of Jesus on moral questions. Few things remain more undiscovered than His great words. In a peculiar sense the four gospels are Christianity's text-book. It is of the first importance for the Christian to know his own text-book. I think that the second Sunday service in every church should be, not a preaching service, but a teaching service, an informal and open Bible class for the study of the New Testament. Such a service would be more difficult to conduct than a preaching service, for in it the pulpit would be called upon to explain and defend its own statements. But it would fairly face the

need of a class of men to-day who are disposed to think that the pulpit is a "coward's castle" and that Christianity cannot be discussed because it has nothing to say for itself. It seems to me that nothing could be more fitting than to see the members of any Christian church engaged once a week in an honest study to find out accurately what the four gospels say about Jesus and His teaching.

It seems probable that during the next ten years the four gospels will be subjected to a more searching criticism than ever before, but a sound historical criticism is not a thing to be feared. So long as the fundamental principles of evidence are kept in mind, the four gospels will not suffer harm. If Jesus did not say the words attributed to Him, then the man who did is my Christ; that is to say, I believe the four gospels, as we have them, are their own evidence. I believe that fact is more important than is generally appreciated. The story of a perfect life is as much a miracle among books as the perfect life of Christ is among men. Here is a picture of a perfect goodness, written not by men of gen-

ius, but by the hands of lowly men, who frequently misunderstood Him, and yet they never record any saying of Jesus of which you could say, I wish Jesus had not said that. Here is a question of the first importance for literary students. The only answer I am able to make to that question is the answer by Tennyson, "Something sealed the lips of that evangelist." The four gospels are not ordinary literature.

I conceive it to be the chief duty of the minister to bring men and women face to face with the portrait of Jesus, assuming nothing about it except that we have it in our hands. I would first of all have men become lovers of Jesus by becoming acquainted with Him. I would leave all metaphysical and theological questions alone until that is done. Not that theology is not important. Every man who thinks on religious matters must have a theology. To refuse to theologize is to refuse to think on religious things, but theology to be of any value must be not a formal product, nor a party badge, but a vital outgrowth of experience. We must get our data before we draw our con-

clusions. This is the only proper approach both logically and historically. The first disciples came to their views of Jesus's nature and person late in their experience. They first of all were loyally bound to Him in bonds of love.

When men have once honestly made themselves acquainted with the Christ of the four gospels, they will either see that He is something more than a man, or they will be forced to abandon the four gospels as trustworthy documents. When a man has done that he will find not only that he has somehow to account for the existence of the gospels, but he will see also that for any adequate philosophy of life or explanation of the strange world in which he lives, for any reasonable hope of a true destiny, for any tentative solution of life's problems and sorrows, his choice lies between the Christ of the four gospels and nothing.

Men will doubtless be kept from any such result because of a strange experience they have in any sincere study of the four gospels. Carnegie Simpson has called special attention to this singular phenomenon. We begin intellectually to

examine Jesus, we soon find that He is spiritually examining us. We read Aristotle and are edified. We read Jesus and are spiritually disturbed. No man can honestly study Jesus and remain morally non-committal. If men had honestly studied Jesus, it would have been unnecessary for Washington Gladden to have invented the term "Applied Christianity," for the Christianity of Christ involves the necessity of making an application of it. This leads me to say that one of the first needs of the church of to-day is the honesty and courage to apply the principles of Jesus to every question in life. Many years ago Roswell D. Hitchcock said that the prime need of our time is "to Christianize Christendom." Men are seeing as they never saw before what is written large in the four gospels, that every political and economic and social problem is at bottom a religious problem. Men are seeing what was a primary teaching of Jesus, that there is no such thing as individual goodness, for goodness is love and cannot be shown in an isolated life, for love is service to others. Men are

seeing that service is the first law of the Christian life, that happiness and heaven and even character are by-products of service. The most subtle peril of religious men is the tendency to substitute emotional loyalty for practical loyalty; to think that the forgiveness of one's sins makes it unnecessary to fight against one's sins. If a man says he believes in cleanliness but will not get into the bathtub in the morning, he does not really believe in cleanliness, he believes only in the *idea* of cleanliness. To deserve an honest man's respect, a religion must produce its legitimate product, moral behavior. At this point the religious leaders in Jesus' day failed and for this reason He denounced them. If our religious leaders fail it will be for the same reason, and can they complain if honest men repeat Jesus' verdict?

Whatever faults the church has, nothing is gained by being unfair to her, and in justice could it not be said that she is now doing more for the betterment of the world than any other one society? But whether they are justified or not, certainly there exists a large class of

good men who admire the church more for what she might be than for what she is. Why this is so, that is the pertinent question for the church to ask herself. The demand which our day is making of the church and her ministers is that they stand for the rediscovered fundamentals of Christ's teaching. It is a striking and suggestive sight to-day to see the great moral and religious movements that are being carried on outside the Christian Church, inspired indeed by Christianity, but no longer controlled or guided by organized Christianity alone. I think they ought to be, for the reason that the "proper nurse for Moses is Moses's mother," not that the leadership of the church is a thing to be sought for its own sake, but the real question for the church to-day is what part she is to have in the regeneration of the world, which Christ is working and can work either with or without the help of the church.

It is a matter of serious concern for the church to notice that although men may not attend the church as much as they once did, yet, at the same time, the coun-

try itself is more Christian now than ever before. This fact indeed constitutes a challenge. Side by side with this condition there exists another which constitutes just as distinct a call to the church. There is a surprisingly large number of men, both inside and outside of the church, who have never accepted the spiritual leadership of Jesus, frankly alleging as the reason, their opinion that the principles of Jesus are not practicable for the social and economic problems of to-day; that the golden rule is a beautiful sentiment, but will not work; that Jesus is not just the type of character to be the ideal for a business man of to-day. My contention is that the principles of Jesus are the most practicable principles there are and the only principles which will produce certain results which men profess to seek. Only men have not discovered that this is so, that's all. John said that Jesus was so expert in His knowledge of men that in forming His judgment of them He did not need the help of His friends. Yet Jesus was the purest-minded of men and knew nothing of sin by experience. Purity gave Him in-

sight. The same is true of all men. Long before Jesus concretely illustrated it in His own life, Plato stated the fact and stated as its explanation that vice can never know both itself and virtue, but virtue acquires a knowledge at once of itself and of vice. It remained for Jesus to demonstrate this fact. I am convinced that it is quite possible to demonstrate both in theory and practice, even from the practical standpoint of this world's business, that the *wise* man is the *good* man; that the vicious man is not the clever but the stupid man. It still remains for Christian men to accept this principle and practice it. A clear understanding of this truth is one of the first needs today of the men of America who are constantly tempted to admire smartness rather than goodness. Until Christian men accept this fundamental teaching of Jesus they will make no serious attempt to apply His other teachings to commercial and political life. To demonstrate this fact is a duty that looms large for the church to-day. It constitutes a call for leaders of honesty and courage, by whom alone the task can be performed.

I regard it, therefore, as a chief duty of the minister to make an honest effort to apply the teachings of Jesus to all the conditions of life. It was a true instinct that led Longfellow, in his drama, "Christus," which occupied so large a share of his thought and life, to sum up his study of Christendom in the apostolic, middle, and modern ages, by this significant statement, put into the mouth of John:

"From all vain pomps and shows,
From the pride that overflows,
And the false conceits of men;
From all the narrow rules,
And subtleties of Schools,
And the craft of tongue and pen;
Bewildered in its search,
Bewildered with the cry,
Lo, here! lo, there, the Church!
Poor, sad Humanity
Through all the dust and heat
Turns back with bleeding feet,
By the weary road it came
Unto the simple thought
By the great Master taught
And that remaineth still:
Not he that repeateth the name,
But he that ~~did~~ the will."

The measure of the church's success is not in the number of times she repeateth the name, but the degree in which she doeth the will.

The five statements I have just made are, in the language of the religious experience of to-day, the "five points" of my practical working theology.

Sin is a reality and salvation is a present process.

The intellect is limited and faith is therefore a necessity.

Life must be construed, not in terms of matter, but of spirit.

The cross in our experience is a means to a good end.

The Christ of the gospels is the sole and sufficient guide for life.

The business of the minister, I take it, is to be a witness of these facts, for the gospel of Jesus is essentially a factual religion. This is the gospel which I think is needed for our age. To preach this gospel, I call imperial preaching, for it is the gospel needed by all ages and by all classes of men. To preach imperially means that a man must not pull down but

build up, or rather must never pull down except for the purpose of building up. If sometimes he feels it his duty to destroy what he believes to be false, even then he must never forget that "he only destroys who can replace."

One of the most subtle dangers before the minister of to-day is the failure to see that the formulas of the old creeds which once were alive to the men who used them, but mean little to the men of to-day, that these formulas, although they seem crude and inadequate to us, nevertheless stand for the fundamental facts of Christianity, and the manifest needs of human life. The failure to see this has led many a man to throw away the essential thing together with the outgrown expression of it. To do this is an illogical act. It is to do what the Germans say—"throw out the baby with the bath." In this revolt against the old formulas some men seem never able to get rid of their feeling of resentment against them. Therefore they spend much of their time in attacking what is already outgrown instead of putting something positive in its place. They seem never able to realize

that the battle is over. Nothing could be a greater mistake.

The great task before the minister to-day is to restate the historic facts of Christianity as they are related to the deep needs of the human heart, in the language used to-day, so that they may be understood. Many men to-day lack a sense of reality and enthusiasm in their religious lives just because they have either given up the old formulas, or hold to them in a half-hearted way, and they have found nothing else to take their place. The same sense of reality and enthusiasm which characterized the men of a former day will return to the men of our day as soon as the Christian life is explained to them in terms which they can understand. It will be the discovery and renascence of a new life of wonder and faith and joy such as Jesus brought to men in the lanes and fields of Galilee. The need for the minister who will do this work was never more urgent than now; his opportunity never so exceptional. In doing this work, the minister's true relation to the old truths is well illustrated by an experience of Asa

Holmes, the cross-roads philosopher—"The last time I went East to visit my grandson," said the old man meditatively, "his wife showed me a mahogany table in her dining-room which she said was making all her friends break the tenth commandment. It was a handsome piece of furniture, worth a small fortune. It was polished till you could see your face in it, and I thought it was the newest thing out in tables, till she told me she'd rummaged it out of her great-grandmother's attic and had it done over as she called it. It had been hidden away in the dust and cobwebs for a lifetime, because it had been pronounced too time-worn and battered and scratched for longer use; yet there it stood just as beautiful and useful for this generation to spread its feasts upon as it was the day it was made. Every whit as substantial, and, aside from any question of sentiment, a thousand times more valuable than the one that Dunk Smith drove past with just now. His table is modern, to be sure, but it's of cheap pine, too rickety to serve even Dunk through his one short lifetime of movings." The task before

the minister to-day is to "do over" the old statements of the historic facts of Christianity and the essential needs of human life. There can be no doubt but that they need doing over. Many layers of dust and cobwebs must be removed if they are to be serviceable to men now. But when we have done that we shall find that after all they are the things of real value, they are solid mahogany. I believe if we go deep enough, we shall find that the real needs of the men of every age are exactly the same, however diverse the forms they assume. Sin is still the same monotonous reality it always has been; the need of an actual atonement, of a harmony between man's will and God's, still is the deepest need of human nature; the intellect is still impotent to find ultimate reality, despite the immensely widened horizons which modern discoveries have created in man's outlook; the sanity of living the trustful life is still as apparent to men of the deepest insight as it ever was; the task of discovering the spiritual meaning of life is still the chief task before every man who is awake; the cry for some comfort

is an universal cry which the essential loneliness of life compels all men to utter; the moral and spiritual leadership of Jesus will remain undisputed so long as men must go backward for their morals to him as they are now doing.

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